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551

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JULY 7-20, 2016

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ON THE COVER

A perfect fit: opening hearts and homes, adoption options are numerous for families. Photo courtesy of CH/LSS

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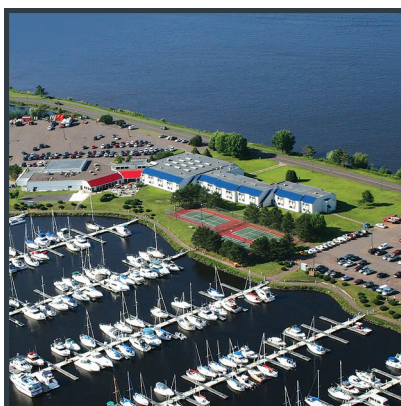
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Stepping In, Stepping Up

I observed my five-year anniversary with Lavender the day the last issue came out. I didn't write for that issue, and it gave me time to reflect on all the topics we've covered over those five years and how this Children & Family Issue covers a few more tough ones that have been on my list of topics we can't ignore as a community: adoption and youth sexual exploitation. If you read the pieces by Kathleen Bradbury and Shane Lueck, you'll see that they work together quite well as methods of intervention, while also warning us that we have to work toward prevention as well as reparation both before and after kids have been left on their own.

The intervention that is being laid out is how, through adoption, people from this community can help kids who need homes, who are no longer in homes that will nurture and support them through their development. This may be for a number of reasons, and we know that for kids who come out as GLBT, they are at greater risk of being disowned by their families because of their sexual orientation or identity. So, we are given the opportunity to intervene and be there for them. That intervention could be what actually prevents them from the world in which they might be a sexually exploited child. And that prevention is critical. Before they become a victim who is relying on a person who is sending them out as sexual property for their own commercial gain, these kids can find a home and someone to protect them from decisions that don't seem like decisions at all. As vulnerable as they are, they have no agency. They need a guardian, in both a literal and figurative sense. You could become such a guardian.

For many kids, they're already in a life that has treated them cruelly. Whether shuffled from home to home or even put into a system of sexual exploitation, reparation is necessary for them to thrive as members of our society. If there's no way you can become a foster or adoptive parent, look to volunteering with youth organizations for at-risk kids. Be there to help them as they repair their sense of worth and belonging. Be a role model, a mentor, a person who simply cares about them and takes time for them.

And, finally, it can't go without saying that we can also work to prevent kids from the darkness by working to change the hearts and minds of people who encounter them. Both scenarios might seem unlikely to fix, but if somehow you find yourself in the situation of being able to stop a parent from rejecting their child or being able to stop a person from sexually exploiting a child, that might be the most difficult and important role you'll ever find yourself in. How do you know if someone might reject their child from coming out? That's a nuanced situation that may never present itself to you. As to the topic of sexual exploitation, if there's no market for "buying" youth for sex, there's no market for "selling" youth for sex.

I have great hopes for our future. The kids who are growing up now will be a generation that is growing up with more equality for all than ever. Their potential is great, if they are given a chance to reach it.

With hope and thanks,

Andy ■



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It's Not Going to Stop. So?

My thoughts have been swirling since Orlando, but I've come to one conclusion: Hatred is not going to stop. Not toward blacks, women, Jews, other religions and cultures; and not toward gays, lesbians, and transgender individuals.

In fact, the more inclusive much of the nation becomes, the more fiercely and violently will the fundamentalist minority fight against their own perceived persecution. What persecution you ask? That they don't get it all. They are infuriated to see those they've considered others now taking a place at 'their' table from which they were formerly able to exclude them.

While some insist Orlando massacre is the act of a religious terrorist, more information is painting the perpetrator as angry, self-hating; perhaps twisted by his fundamentalist Islamic upbringing, just as the horrific acts of the Roofs and McVeighs can be seen as the fruits of Christian fundamentalist hatred. McVeigh went to his execution unblinking, unrepentant.

The more women demonstrate competence, the more pronounced the backlash against them as well. Suddenly, in 2014, women comprised 56 percent of the nation's college undergraduates, and now they're fre-

quent targets of fellow male students. The recent sexual violation of an unconscious young woman netted the perpetrator a mere three months in jail as his dad pronounced the punishment too harsh for "twenty minutes of action."

But there is change, and it is not small or unimportant. When the Up-Stairs Lounge in New Orleans was torched June 24, 1973, there were 32 deaths. News coverage was limited, and after a local Episcopal church held a small prayer service, they received hate mail and a rebuke from the Episcopal bishop of New Orleans.

The reaction to the Orlando massacre was explosive and worldwide; the Eiffel tower and other icons blazed in rainbow colors while hundreds (homosexuals excluded) lined up to give blood. There were also the inevitable hateful responses, but the pastor of Sacramento's Verity Baptist Church, praying for the demise of the hospitalized, was told in no uncertain terms that his church's lease will not be renewed.

So? The answer is to stand up; be seen; keep taking your place at the table. Times are changing, and those of us in any minority must continue to help not only our rainbow selves, but all others along the human spectrum. ■

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Your editorial “A Coward Strikes Again” [Lavender #550, June 23-July 6, 2016], is shocking and deeply disappointing. To label the actions of a man who “joined” ISIS via cellphone as the police were closing in to shoot him, as being motivated by his “religion” to murder 49 people in a gay nightclub, is the most bigoted and irresponsible thing one could possibly say about the Orlando tragedy.

This man was a batterer, not a fundamentalist. If he had been in prison for beating up his ex-wife, he wouldn’t have been able to kill 49 members of our community. He was also known to co-workers, at least one gun shop, and the FBI to have made repeated threats of violence toward gays. And of course the guns he used are what actually did the killing. He didn’t hit people over the head with religious books, he shot them. For you to state that “this is not an issue of access to guns” is insulting.

Please don’t ever let your personal prejudice make it to the printed pages of Lavender again — you shame yourselves and wound our humanity by printing them.

Trina Porte

From the Editorial Board: To quote the editorial: “Contrary to those running for president who wish to take political advantage in this time of tragedy, this is not an issue of access to guns, nor is it an issue about immigration. This cowardly attack is solely an issue of religion.”

Response to Community re: Lavender Issue 550 Editorial “Spirit of ’76 (A Coward Strikes Again)”

We sincerely thank those who wrote by email or comment for sharing their welcomed perspectives.

The poem quoted on the front cover of Lavender’s Issue 550 is called “Invictus.” The Victorian era verses were the inspiration used by a great man who stood up to the oppression against him because of who he was. He refused to yield no matter what was done to him: psychological torture, life in prison at hard labor, or even the threat of death. “Invictus” was a catalyst for Nelson Mandela and President Obama quoted the poem at his 2013 memorial service. The image of the “Spirit of ’76” was chosen to evoke a memory of a time when this country worked to put the Constitution before any of the religious beliefs that the new inhabitants of this country brought with them. We want to remind people of the importance of the Constitution and the separation of Church and State again in the wake of this tragedy in Orlando.

Omar Mateen was torn internally between inculcated doctrine and natural sexual feelings. This inner conflict was entangled in deep religious roots, whether his or others. This case is far from the first to suggest a causal relationship between religious self-hatred and gay homicide. Minneapolis-based Center for Homicide Research is a volunteer-driven nonprofit that has seen cases of self-loathing individuals struggling with incompatible Christian teachings, and killing their own.

While his background was Muslim, Islam is not the only religious background that has taught intolerance regarding this community. And, we acknowledge that many changes are happening within religions to combat these intolerances today in 2016. But, consider that a number of the victims of the shooting were from Puerto Rico, which is largely still intolerant of same-sex marriage, with the Pew Research Center citing 55 percent of Puerto Rico to oppose same-sex marriage, being 72 percent of Protestants and 45 percent of Catholics. Many of the 49 victims had ex-

This editorial — which I assume is endorsed by your staff and publisher — is hate speech accompanied by a disturbingly offensive cover image. I reject the erasure of queer Muslims. I reject the targeting of the Muslim community. I reject the erasure of the reality that the majority of lives lost at Pulse were people of color, Latinx specifically. I reject the glorification of brute violence against Native people and stealing land. I reject the media source that just legitimized Islamophobic hate speech as an editorial.

Please print a retraction and apology. This issue does not represent the LGBTQ community.

Becky Smith

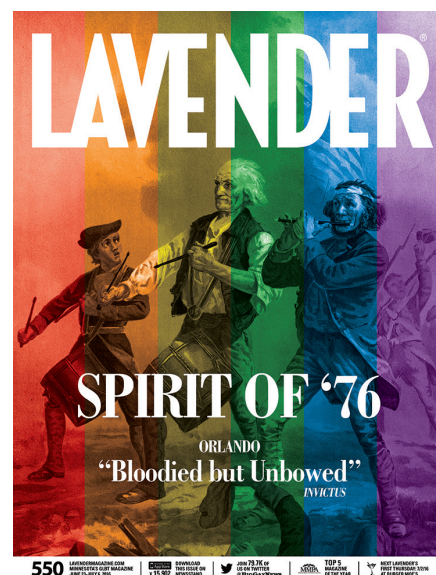
This is a deeply racist article, and a disturbingly offensive cover image. As a white queer person, I understand that my liberation is intimately connected to fighting white supremacy and colonial thinking, and if it wasn’t, it would still be the right thing to do. Please print a retraction and apology. This issue does not represent the LGBTQ community.

Davey Wilkes

perienced their own homeland’s religious intolerance before one man’s conflicted ideas terminated their existence.

We are standing up for the 49 people who were murdered for who they are. A problem defined is half-solved. We acknowledge the role religious beliefs can play in fomenting internalized homophobia. We see it in how people are raised as being considered sinners simply for being who they are to legislators continuing to fight against equal rights for this community through their “Religious Freedom Restoration Acts.” It is no wonder that this community is targeted.

Editorial Board



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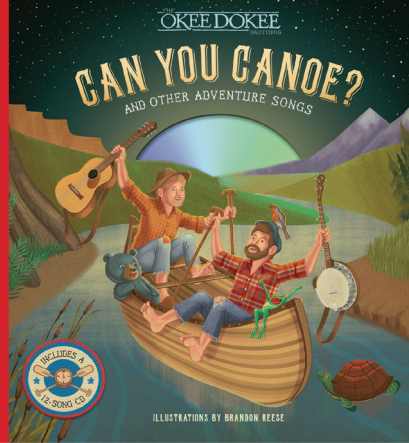
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The Lion King. Photo by Matthew Murphy

LEAVING VOGUE MORAN

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Vogue Moran was the name cisgender male, Wayne Mahon, gave himself when he began exploring sex and intimacy with transgender people. Hopefully, this groundbreaking documentary won't be blacklisted by those who object to Mahon and the transgender people in the film who refer to themselves as transsexuals. Much of the film was shot in 2008 in Connecticut where Moran/Mahon is from and *Leaving Vogue Moran* reflects communities there and not the Twin Cities. It should be noted that in another fine trans documentary, titled *What's the T?*, the transwomen interviewed are honest about the confusion around current terminology around trans identity.

The moniker, Vogue Moran, was inspired by Wayne's obsession with comic books. By relating to superheroes he coped with insecurity, low self-esteem and self-image. This interest set him apart from others and has helped him cope with feelings of alienation.

When Wayne first went to a queer bar at age 18 he was very clear that he was not attracted to the uber-macho-appearing men there. However, he quickly realized that he was beguiled by the transwomen there. This gave way to his first sexual experience with a transwoman. Unfortunately, afterwards he felt terribly guilty.

Few films have delved into the issue of cisgender men who are not gay, nor who are attracted to cisgender women, but who are primarily attracted to male-to-female transgender people. Such men often live in their own sort of closet because they are afraid that the unenlightened will label them as gay. A recipe for ostracism. However, these men are of a wholly different type of sexual orientation in itself. Note that Wayne is not attracted to cisgender men, either gay or straight, but to transwomen.



Leaving Vogue Moran. Photo by Nadia Valentine

To make matters worse, some such men exclusively attracted to transwomen do not accept those they are attracted to, hence, treating them like one-night-stand sex objects who must be shuttled out of the house early in the morning. They live within anxious internalized shame. Wayne saw this negative pattern in himself and bravely dealt with it. This documentary also contains comments from transwomen who receive the belittling brunt of these men's internalized shame and embarrassment.

Leaving Vogue Moran shows Wayne coming out to his mother and father. His late mother was a true paradox as some of her comments about her son are quite nasty, yet she had compassionately thought through what trans folks are up against. Happily, his father was more understanding than he or his mother gave him credit for. The parents add great dimension to a remarkable film that will challenge assumptions.

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Director/designer Julie Taymor's production of *The Lion King* was a groundbreaker when it debuted 19 years ago at the Orpheum Theatre in Minneapolis, three months before it opened in New York. However, two decades later it is still innovative in the realm of Broadway fare thanks to Taymor's collaboration with designer Michael Curry. Few, if any, productions in the history of the Great White Way have made so many puppets central to their execution. There are a total of 200 rod, shadow, and full-sized puppets. Moreover, there is probably no Broadway show ever that has as many images and representations of wildlife.

Here is a breakdown of the multiple and multiplex representations you will see on stage: 100 ants on the Ant-Hill Lady costume, 45 wigs, 52 wildebeests, 39 hyenas, 14 lionesses, 12 bird kites, five bird ladies, one bird man, three zebras, two elephants, two antelope, one rhinoceros, one cheetah. There are a total of 25 types of animals, birds, fish, and insects portrayed.

There are not only 15 gazelles but five actors each wear a gazelle puppet on both arms and one is attached to their head. There are also six gazelles on the gazelle wheel prop and six representations of the *Lion King* protagonist, Simba, from babyhood to adult.



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SOUTH PACIFIC

Through Aug. 28

Guthrie Theater, 818 S 2nd St., Minneapolis

612-377-2224

www.guthrietheater.org

The Guthrie Theater's artistic director, Joseph Haj, began his tenure last year. The summer revival of Rodgers and Hammerstein's Pulitzer Prize-winning musical, *South Pacific*, is his first Guthrie musical that he, himself, is directing. It is an ideal choice for a man who feels so passionately about human rights. Anti-intellectual lefties will often reject out of hand anything that bears the name of the great musical creative duo, as well as the magisterially humane James Michener, whose book, *Tales of the South Pacific*, provides the basis. But in this case, they will be grasping for straws.

South Pacific addresses love between two people from two different western nations and languages as well as a supporting love story between a woman and man of different races, and the children whose welfare is a bonding element. The tune that speaks so powerfully of love targeted by discrimination is "You've Got to be Carefully Taught." *South Pacific* was made into a towering 1958 film, just as the duo's *The Sound of Music*, which also deals vividly with children's humanity, was made into a towering film in 1965.

URINETOWN

July 12-17

Theatre L'Homme Dieu, 1875 County Rd. 120 NE

Alexandria, MN

320-846-3150

www.tlhd.org

Joshua James Campbell is a dynamic musical actor who has taken the directorial reins of a major musical at one of greater Minnesota's major playhouses. He shares, "Everyone sets *Urinetown* in the Dust Bowl era, but it's about a dystopian future where there is a severe drought. So, instead, I set it in California 15 years from now and, sadly, that's not too far-fetched. The show first opened in the first years of the 21st century and, roughly 15 years later, the issues feel strangely immediate: who regulates how people go to the bathroom, where do the rights of a government begin and end, what are the ramifications of a sig-

*South Pacific*. Photo by T. Charles Erickson*Urinetown*. Photo by Amanda White

nificant class divide? This show is coming to Theatre L'Homme Dieu from DalekoArts. I love Daleko's mission to decentralize the arts scene in the Twin Cities; the company brings professional artists to New Prague and Alexandria expanding professional theater's reach to greater Minnesota."

**I'LL EAT YOU LAST:
A CHAT WITH SUE
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612-568-2170

www.candidtheaterco.com

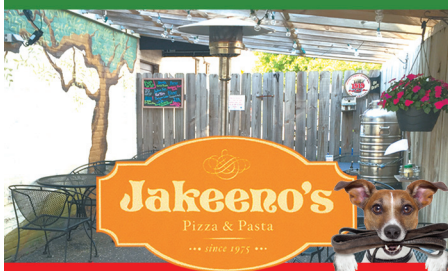
Julie Dafydd is renowned as a GLBT community veteran columnist. She is also a theatrical artist of note, having won the regional Kennedy Center Award for Best Actress and Best Original Script for her autobiographical play, *Soderville*. Dafydd is now delving into the role of legendary Hollywood agent and power broker, Sue Mengers (1932-2011), in a joint area premiere production between Candid Theater Company and Lush. John Logan's solo bio-play first played in 2013 in New York with Bette Midler.

I'll Eat You Last: A Chat With

Sue Mengers begins in 1981 when the agent has just been fired by Barbra Streisand's attorneys. Dafydd relates, "She is waiting anxiously for Barbra to call her back. For the next 90 minutes the audience is treated to fascinating movieland stories and delicious gossip from arguably the most powerful super agent in Hollywood history. Sue's lifelong obsession with movies and movie stars began as a fat, little German Jewess immigrant struggling to learn English primarily through screen legends Joan Crawford and Bette Davis in little fleapit theaters across Utica, New York."

Dafydd points out, "A defining moment came early in her life when 'the bravest thing she ever did' was to cross the playground to speak English to the most popular girl in school. 'Crossing the playground' became a metaphor for her life as she courageously took on the big boys of showbiz and schmoozed herself into the lives of the world's biggest stars." Mengers said, "You want to be a thing, you make yourself that thing." ■

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Kid-Friendly Restaurants

Eating with kids is a careful tightrope walk of balancing (reasonably) healthy food with efficiency in service and a flexibility for those who play out the politics of their plates like a last war stand. Also, it would be extra nice if the adults could actually enjoy the food, too. Here are my favorite places to bring the little ones and dig into some delicious food.

FIKA

Who doesn't want to dine at a castle? Actually, the inside of Fika in the American Swedish Institute looks like a refined Ikea cafeteria and it's attached to the castle. In the warm months, the outside patio




blue PLATE

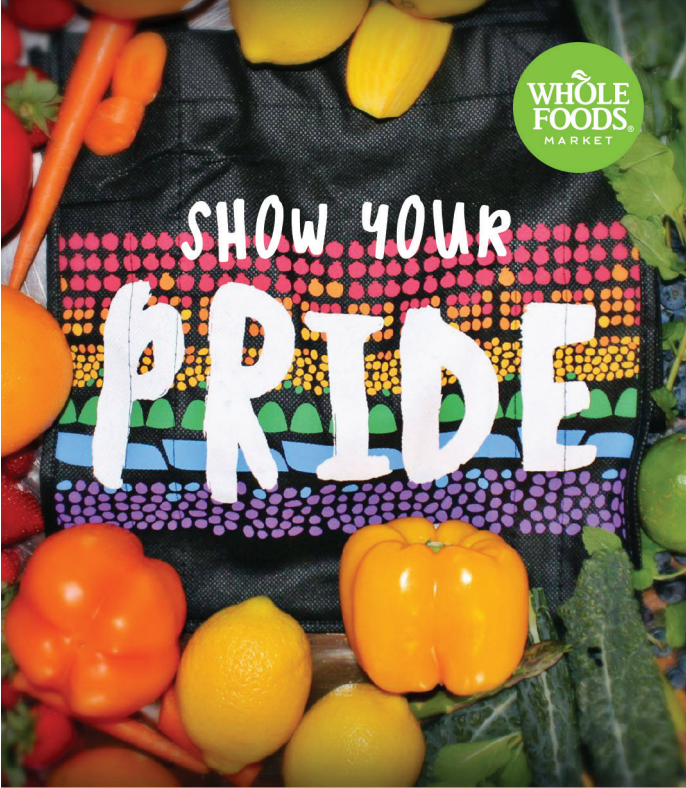
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is the best spot to bring kids. You'll find a play area where there's a cart filled with fun activities to play with for every age, from glittering hula hoops to the old ball-in-a-cup game. Since Fika is open every day for lunch, it's a perfect spot to catch up with other parents. Adults will find plenty to enjoy and kids will appreciate the open-faced sandwiches, which are perfect for little hands. And for those with a sweet tooth, Fika's baked goods are divine, especially the cardamom bun. This lunchtime retreat is a lovely spot to dine and watch the kids play. **2600 Park Avenue, Minneapolis. www.fikacafe.net**

PRAIRIE DOGS

Kids dig a tubed meat and so do we. The sausage artists at Prairie Dogs take the average wiener and make it an extraordinarily flavored bite of food. Go plain Jane or get crazy with a Sonoran dog, wrapped in bacon and served with creamy beans, cotija, and mayo. Or, grab my personal favorite, the Banh Mi Joy Dog. It's the sweet, sweet love child of a hot dog and the classic Vietnamese sandwich. Finish the meal with a dreamy ice cream shake made with Sebastian Joe's ice cream. **610 W. Lake Street, Minneapolis. www.prairiedogsausage.com**

SANDCASTLE

On the edge of Lake Nokomis, this food stand is light-years ahead of the old fashioned concession stand. First of all, maybe start with a cinnamon dusted horchata (so creamy and fresh!) followed by crazy good hot dogs and, on Friday nights, the fried chicken special is enough to plan an end-of-week outing around. Kids can dig in the sand and chase ducks while adults can indulge in a little wine or glass of craft beer.

4955 W. Lake Nokomis Parkway, Minneapolis www.sandcastlempls.com

SMALLEY'S BARBECUE

Got a kid with a pirate obsession? They will love this Stillwater restaurant. Let the little ones rummage through a treasure chest for a little distraction. The ample outdoor seating makes for easy cleanup for those whose eating accuracy may still be in development. The food from La Belle Vie alum Shawn Smalley is a wallop to the taste buds. The wings are available in all manner of heat level and are consistently tasty no matter your bravery index. The crowd-pleasing stunner of a side dish is unquestionably the mac and cheese. The little elbow pasta of your youth is smothered in rich and creamy cheese and topped with mild, smoky poblanos and a few crumbles of bacon. **423 Main Street South, Stillwater. www.smalleyscaribbeanbbq.com**

BLUE PLATE RESTAURANTS: LONGFELLOW GRILL, HIGHLAND GRILL, THE EDINA GRILL, 3 SQUARES, THE LOWRY, THE FREEHOUSE

Stephanie Shimp and David Burley, the owners of the Blue Plate restaurant group, have a knack for understanding what kind of restaurant will best serve a neighborhood. One thing all their restaurants have in common is an atmosphere and a menu to make kids comfortable. Anyone can appreciate the mammoth waffles studded with bananas and walnuts served with real maple syrup, thank you very much. Menus are tailored to their neighbors: oysters in Uptown, crinkle fries at the Tap, sweet potato fries in Longfellow, stunning salads in Edina, massive breakfast burritos in Highland, and a lovely selection of white wines at 3 Squares. No matter what part of town you're meeting the extended family in, if the kids are in tow, everyone will be happy at a Blue Plate eatery. **Various locations. www.blueplaterestaurantco.com/locations**

BRASA PREMIUM ROTISSERIE

Kid-friendly does not always equal nutritious. How often are the kid menu options the worst representatives of the food world? There



Photo courtesy of Bigstock/romrodinka

is a safe haven at Brasa, where the food is locally grown, deliciously prepared, and served by people who are actually happy to cater to the small humans as well as the ones stuck paying the check. The tender pork is divine, packed with flavor, but easy for even the earliest teethingers who are starting on real food to eat. Plus, if you're trying to avoid gluten, almost all of the dishes here are safe (except for the obvious sandwiches and cornbread). Make sure to try their house made sodas, too.

Two locations: 777 Grand Avenue, St. Paul 600 E. Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis www.brasa.us

MIDTOWN GLOBAL MARKET

Take the little ones on a global eating adventure. This food hall on East Lake Street is home to a million and one food options and the most fun way to introduce the smaller humans to new and exciting flavors: there are tagines, eggrolls, pitas, pho (it's just noodle soup), cupcakes, cakes, cookies, candies, and tacos — a myriad of glorious tacos. In one corner is a little play area for the really wee ones and there are two days a week to mark on your calendars for kid and family fun: Wee Wednesdays at 10:30 a.m. and Family Fridays at 5:00 p.m. **920 E. Lake Street, Minneapolis. www.midtownglobalmarket.org**

PUNCH PIZZA

There's the desperation of the hangries with little kids. All they want to do is wander around the room, likely destroy things and eventually throw a ridiculous fit about something big, like that the water is too wet. The key to avoiding complete catastrophe is to get that food into their mouths fast. It is unreal how fast those pizzas come out of the burning ovens and what does arrive is a delicious pizza, making the adults happy as well. **Various locations. www.punchpizza.com**

MICKEY'S DINER

Diner food certainly can't be for every meal, but kids love a train car, and these are the moments when lifetimes of memories are formed. Roll in at the ungodly morning hours kept by those of us at the mercy of Dory fans and you can expect to find cheerful waitresses with crooked smiles. Juices are served promptly, and the food takes seconds to arrive from the nearby grill. There is a time for fighting for whole grains and kale, but there are precious few times when you can all happily eat in golden, satisfied silence before the chaos of the world descends again. **36 W. 7th Street, St. Paul. www.mickeysdiningcar.com ■**

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THE UGLY TRUTH THE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF OUR YOUTH

BY SHANE LUECK

“My first time on the streets, I was approached at a bus stop. The pimp was nice, buying me things and letting me stay with him. He had a lot of girls coming and going. The second time I was taken to a house with windows covered. There were six or seven girls there naked, some had been there for days or months. I was injected with drugs and was forced to work even when pregnant. This house was on the North side. I was able to fake a stomach ache and my pimp dropped me off at the hospital.”

These haunting experiences come from a victim of sexual exploitation, shared during a survey with Beth Holger-Ambrose that was eventually published in the *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* in 2013. Having worked in the field for 18 years, formerly with the Minnesota Department of Human Services and now as the executive director of The Link, an organization working with youth dealing with homelessness, truancy, and the juvenile legal system, Holger-Ambrose has heard countless accounts of sexual exploitation of youth, when someone under the age of 18 engages in commercial sexual activity.

According to the Minnesota Department of Health, commercial sexual activity occurs when anything of value or a promise of anything of value (such as money, drugs, food, shelter, rent, or social status) is given to a person by any means in exchange for any type of sexual activ-

ity. A third party may or may not be involved.

Holger-Ambrose will tell you, the personal story shared by a young woman in her survey is by no means the only one. One study estimates as many as 325,000 children in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico are at risk each year for becoming victims of sexual exploitation. Of those, a vast portion are taken advantage of while experiencing homelessness, with numbers ranging from study to study, one of which estimates 30 percent of shelter youth and 70 percent of street youth are victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

These youth may engage or be coerced into prostitution for “survival sex” to meet daily needs for food, shelter, or drugs. Other terms that may be used to talk about sexual exploitation are “child prostitution” and “youth sex trade.” Many sexually exploited youth face realities of



Photo courtesy of Bistock/squidmediaro

drug use, homelessness, past trauma, and other factors which have lead them into the survival sex trade. Other youth may have no such history and may have been lured, tricked, or forced into being sexually exploited.

Commander Robert Thomasser oversees the St. Paul Police Department's human trafficking department, and he makes no bones about it: anyone can fall victim to sexual exploitation. Rich or poor, becoming involved in "the life," as it's called, can entice youth of any background.

"Sexual exploitation can occur in any community," he says. "When people think of the topic of human trafficking, they think of this image of a third world country, probably a young girl in chains smuggled on some boat or something. What we are trying to do is break down that stereotypical image and say that this can happen to any child. Regardless of their financial background, their religious background, their sexual orientation, anything. Everybody is vulnerable to this."

Speaking from her personal experience, Holger-Ambrose notices higher rates of GLBT youth falling victim to sexual exploitation than their heterosexual counterparts. Citing homelessness, running away from home multiple times, and being in the foster care system as the biggest risk factors, Holger-Ambrose says, "Unfortunately, since we see higher rates of LGBTQ youth in the population of homeless youth, then we also are seeing similar rates within the youth who are being sexually exploited."

The Minnesota Human Trafficking Task Force, operated out of the Minnesota Department of Health, also notes that GLBT youth are an over-represented sub-population within victims of sexual exploitation. Various studies have found that between 20 and 40 percent of unaccompanied homeless youth identify as GLBT, compared to three to five percent of the general youth population, while one local Minneapolis study found that nearly one third of sexually exploited youth self-identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Research from the Family Acceptance Project has shown that the average age that an individual "comes out" as GLBT has lowered over time. In the 1970s people were coming out in their early 20s and today the average age that a youth comes out is 13. This younger age means that the youth is most likely still living with their parents or other caregivers who may or may not be accepting of the youth's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Too many GLBT youth still face significant challenges during adolescence and early adulthood, fighting discrimination, misconceptions, and abuse by peers, family members, and others in their communities. The Family Acceptance Project's research also shows that one out of every four youth that come out may be forced out or kicked out of their home by their parents or caregivers. Additionally, transgender individuals experience greater difficulty in finding employment due to transphobia, which can also contribute to an increased risk of sexual exploitation. In fact, a recent study of transgender youth found that 67 percent had engaged in sex work.

According to the Polaris Project, one of the largest resources for sexually exploited people, of the large population of homeless youth who identify as GLBT, 46 percent ran away because of family rejection, they are 7.4 times more likely to experience acts of sexual violence than heterosexual peers, and are three to seven times

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more likely to engage in survival sex to meet basic needs such as shelter, food, and toiletries.

Holger-Ambrose has seen a myriad of reasons for youth to engage in sex work. "Sometimes they are becoming involved because they are literally on the streets homeless and they need a place to stay," she shares. "Someone approaches them and says, 'I can provide this for you, just come with me to this party, give a couple blow jobs, it's really easy, and then you don't have to worry about a safe place to stay anymore.' Sometimes it's because literally the youth have no where to stay and someone says they will provide that for them, at a price."

But needing a place to stay isn't the only avenue into the life. Holger-Ambrose remembers one 16-year-old who identified as cisgender male and gay. "He was way out in the far out suburbs and felt very isolated, didn't know a lot of other gay people," she remembers. "We have heard those stories a lot about isolation. This young person felt very isolated and was on internet chat rooms and online like most young people his age are, and unfortunately he was approached online by a man in his late 60s in Texas who groomed him online."

That older man created an online relationship with the youth, groomed him (built an emotional connection with the young man to gain his trust for the purposes of sexual abuse or exploitation), and then flew to Minnesota and trafficked the boy back to Texas with him. "Because he groomed him and told him how special he was and how amazing he was, that older man basically got him to sleep with him and got him to sleep with other 'friends,' but he profited off of that and earned money off of that."

GLBT people have historically faced discrimination and oppression. Stigmatization and rejection continue today, putting this population at an increased risk for depression, suicide, substance abuse, homelessness, being victims of bullying and other forms of violence, including sexual exploitation.

Whether it is bullying and isolation, as was the case for the 16-year-old Holger-Ambrose worked with, or personal conflict with family and friends, Commander Thomasser says it almost always stems from some sort of trouble in the young person's life.

"Maybe they're having trouble at home with a parent, they're having trouble at school, they're hanging out with the wrong crowd, but for whatever reason they have needs that aren't being met and then these people step in and take advantage of these folks," he says. "Does this occur in the LGBT community? Of course it does, because just like every other community there are vulnerable kids and young adults. So if it's anything that would cause a person to turn to somebody else in a trusting way, and that person that they turn to has got evil intentions, these things occur."

The reality is, once someone becomes involved in the life, it is difficult for many individuals to reach out for assistance, but this is especially true for individuals who fear that they will be mistreated or not believed because of their gender identity or sexual orientation. The Polaris Project found that GLBT youth are overrepresented in detention for prostitution-related offenses and report higher levels of police misconduct than their straight peers.

Furthermore, gay and transgender youth may not have access to anti-trafficking services because they are unaware of services in their area, the community lacks re-

sources (e.g. bed space, funding), or they are concerned that providers are not GLBT friendly.

The trouble with exploitation, especially when the victims are young people without easy access to resources or a place to stay, is that it becomes a cycle of dependency making it difficult for the young person to leave the life. Ryan Berg, the program manager for the ConneQt Host Home Program with Avenues for Homeless Youth says usually multiple service providers will be working on the trauma involved with the experience. Which means, depending on the level of trauma, it varies between a short turnaround to needing a great deal of time and a real safe, affirming space for the youth to get back on their feet.

Holger-Ambrose mentioned that the time it takes to get out of exploitation could also relate to how long they've been involved in the life. "I worked with youth that first got trafficked when they were as young as 10 or 11, and then I meet them when they're 16 or 17," she shares. "So then they're several years deep into the life. Sometimes I've seen youth who are able to — once they connect with supportive services — get out that same week. They don't want to be in the situation. But I've also seen youth that take several years of going back and forth. They might leave the life for a couple months and then something triggers them to go back in, maybe it's a crisis where they need bail money for somebody, or whatever it is."

That kind of back and forth can take as long as four or five years, according to Holger-Ambrose. But not everyone makes it to support services or police. Retired New York City detective James Rothstein says, for the most part, there is no getting out. "You end up dead," he says. "You'll see a lot of suicides. But many of them are killed, they disappear, nobody knows who they are."

"What happens is this: they are used until they have no value anymore," Rothstein continues. "Then usually they get to the point where they help recruit other kids. And then by the time they get into their mid-20s, many of them then themselves become perpetrators."

One respondent to Holger-Ambrose's survey gives a perfect example of the dangerous nature of trading sex for survival. "I had a pimp and would have to get high to turn tricks," she shares. "It's painful, disgusting, and makes me depressed. I've been raped, stabbed, jumped out of a moving vehicle while it was still moving, robbed, been shot at, left for dead once, and have had my head busted two times."

For a crime that impacts every community so prevalently, anyone involved with the prosecution of perpetrators or treatment of victims agrees that sexual exploitation is not talked about enough. It is a heavy topic to discuss. Sexual exploitation and trafficking takes place in the shadows of the Twin Cities, according to Mandy Multerer, co-founder of My Sister, an apparel company whose mission is to raise awareness on the topic.

"People don't want to know or think that it's even happening in their area," Multerer says. "Especially Minneapolis, you may live in an area where it's happening all the time and you just don't know about it."

She says all it takes is a drive down Lake Street to witness sexual exploitation in action. "You can see the patterns of walking and then their pimps and traffickers might be around the corner and you could see them in their cars," Multerer said. "The FBI actually identified Minneapolis as one of the top 13 cities for child sex traf-

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AT THE MALL
OF AMERICA."**

ficking, so that's really important for us to talk about, but it's really a problem in every city and every state."

According to Multerer, one of the biggest misconceptions about Minnesota being so high on the FBI's list is the idea of Duluth as a hub for trafficking. "That's not necessarily a port where people are getting imported and exported," she says. "More so it's a port for people serving the boat workers type of thing."

And Holger-Ambrose doesn't get behind the stereotype of youth getting recruited at the Mall of America. Instead, she says, "More youth get recruited by peers, family members, or online way more often than someone being approached at the Mall of America."

As someone who works specifically with GLBT youth, Berg notices that the places that youth go for comfort can actually be dangerous. "Bars and clubs are kind of sacred spaces for queer and trans folk, but also those spaces can be hunting grounds for those that want to exploit others," he says. "Even though these spaces can become havens for young people who are grappling with identity and looking for community, it's also a space to be hyperalert and vigilant of your surroundings. It becomes a space where young people can become vulnerable to exploitation."

Some of the largest misperceptions, however, involve the identities of the victims and perpetrators. According to Commander Thomasser, most people would believe sexual exploitation is a problem for young girls, and he is quick to dispute that. Although more female-identified youth come forward, male-identified youth make up a large portion of victims as well, with research showing that youth that identify as boys or girls are exploited at equal rates. "It's as much a problem for young men as it is young girls," he says. "And so if they think this is a suburban male predator going after young girls, it's far broader than that."

And even then, it's commonly believed that male victims identify as gay, which isn't always the case. "Some boys in the life will actually use the term gay for pay," Holger-Ambrose says. "Just because someone is involved with sexual exploitation and they're having sex with somebody in exchange for money or anything else, it doesn't necessarily define what their sexual orientation is. Boys that are involved with the sex trade or sexual exploitation often get typecast as all being gay, which isn't always true."

Similar stereotypes exist surrounding the perpetrators, with most people thinking that it is male traffickers. Commander Thomasser divides perpetrators into two categories: those responsible for recruiting the victim into the lifestyle (the trafficker) and those who are buying sex, or engaging in the commercial sex aspect (the John).

Johns tend to be middle-aged males of all races, according to Commander Thomasser, who says he doesn't arrest a lot of women for seeking commercial sex for money. Although, he admits, there are probably women who engage in that as well and just aren't caught. But when it comes to traffickers, he says they can look like anything and be anyone. "The idea that we are now prosecuting women for exactly the same behavior as men shows that that sort of stereotype is getting broken down," he says.

Service providers notice similar trends as the St. Paul Police Department. At The Link, Holger-Ambrose says regardless of the youth being exploited, the buyer is almost always a male. The trafficker, however, runs the gamut of gender, race, and other identities. She says, "There's a lot

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ➔

of stereotypes that only males are traffickers or pimps but we actually see female pimps whether it's a relative, like an older sister or older friend or mothers — people hate to think that, but it's true. Sometimes it's a relative, sometimes it's a friend, but there definitely are female traffickers, female pimps, as well as males."

Since identities of traffickers are somewhat fluid, the key to assisting victims is knowing the warning signs, which can be difficult. Rothstein has a saying: "There are as many things to look for as there are grains of sand on a beach." But he says you will always notice a change in lifestyle for the young person. "You can spot it, you watch a change."

According to Commander Thomasser, the warning signs are evident, but parents and friends need to pay attention to the young people. "Sometimes they'll notice that their kids are maybe hanging out with people who are older than them," he says. "Is that in itself a warning sign? No, but it could be one thing that goes with some others."

Other things to watch out for include if the young person is coming home with nice gifts — nice clothes, a new phone — things that are beyond their normal reach, that might be a clue that someone is giving them these things to entice them into what they're looking for long-term. He says, "Looking for signs when they come home that something is going on where they may be interacting with others while they're away and living beyond their means or really don't need the household any longer because someone else is taking care of them. Those might be some signs to pay attention to."

Unexplainable absences are also a red flag, according to Holger-Ambrose, especially if the youth normally shows up for school or a job consistently and then they are suddenly missing for chunks of time. "If they're kind of missing and they don't have a good explanation of where they're going, that's a big one," she says. "They kind of go AWOL, like three or four days they're missing here and there, that would be a red flag because that could be a sign that their trafficker is taking them around to different states or different locations on a party circuit or something like that."

"If they have a tattoo that they don't feel comfortable explaining to you, sometimes traffickers will get their name or a barcode or something like that, not always but sometimes," she continues. "Also, if a young person is talking about making a lot of money or going to fancy parties or something like that, but then don't seem able to actually keep the money, that might also be a red flag."

After looking at the warning signs, Thomasser and Holger-Ambrose agree that the best thing to do is reach out for help, even if you aren't completely sure someone is being exploited. The St. Paul Police Department is always looking for the public's help in finding crimes where and when they are occurring.

"If someone thinks or suspects, they don't even have to know for sure, if you just think this person might be being sexually exploited," Holger-Ambrose says, "you can refer that person to a regional navigator (a regional first point of contact in Minnesota for someone being exploited), or you, yourself, as a concerned citizen, could call our regional navigator and just talk through the situation and get some advice and resources. If anyone is directly connected with a youth they think is being trafficked, the best thing to do would be to connect them

with the regional navigator in the area."

It can be difficult for victims of trafficking to disclose their situation and reach out for help. Many victims do not identify as victims of trafficking, fear the repercussions of reporting their situation, or simply do not know that help is available. For the safety and well-being of the victim, Minnesota passed the Safe Harbor Law in 2011, decriminalizing prostitution for youth under 18. Holger-Ambrose, who helped create the law, says prior to the law's passing, youth were getting picked up and arrested for prostitution and then put in juvenile detention.

"Basically treating them like a criminal even though someone else was trafficking them and profiting off their exploitation, and then they were getting released right back to their trafficker," she says. "Before Safe Harbor, they were all going to juvenile detention, which I can only imagine how horrible that is after you've been raped multiple times in hotel rooms for someone else to make money and then to be arrested and placed in juvenile detention — it's just the most horrific response. So what's really nice is that, now, the response is to provide them with supportive services and to have the youth have a choice in that and if they do need a safe space to stay, refer them to a therapeutic and supportive service type of shelter or housing program versus juvenile detention."

Some service providers, however, offer housing and assistance for youth up to the age of 24, which is crucial according to Multerer. "When we talk about youth it definitely is up to that age because a lot of the youth that have been exploited started when they were really young," she says. "So then they don't have that education and foundation at 18 to just cut them off and send them away."

The message Holger-Ambrose wants to send is that young people who have been victimized by sexual exploitation or involved with the life are incredibly resilient and are able to successfully transition out of it when they have the right kind of support in their life.

"People who have been victims of sexual exploitation are amazing, resilient people that have a lot of dreams and goals for themselves just like everybody else," She says. "The experience of sexual exploitation shouldn't define them or put a label over them. It's only one experience they've had in their life. We just have to, as a society, see them in a more positive way and give them opportunities to follow those other dreams they have for themselves."

That's a sentiment echoed by Berg, who says that education is an important role in combating exploitation. Berg encourages everyone to do some research and be aware of the services that are available for young people lured into the life.

"Sometimes as a society we've been guilty of victim blaming," he says. "So we need to recognize the fact that these young people have been targeted, have been exploited, and need support. If it is a young person that has resorted to, for example, prostitution, that we realize they are victims of circumstance and of systems and folks that are exploiting them."

"They're victims and survivors and not criminals," he continues. "When we label young people who experience exploitation as criminals, we dehumanize them and separate them; it's easier to just let things go on, business as usual. But they need to be treated with dignity and respect and provided with the services they need. It's really about recognizing that they're human beings with lots of complexity, and they shouldn't be criminalized." ■

RESOURCES

If you believe you are working with a young person who may be a victim of trafficking, you can reach out to the National Human Trafficking Resource Center. The toll-free hotline is available to answer calls from anywhere in the country, 24/7, in over 200 languages. Call 888-373-7888 or text 233733 to talk to a specially trained Hotline Advocate to get help, connect to local services, or get more information about human trafficking.

For more information or to get advice about sexual exploitation, reach out to these resources. If you are in need of immediate help or are in danger, please call 911.

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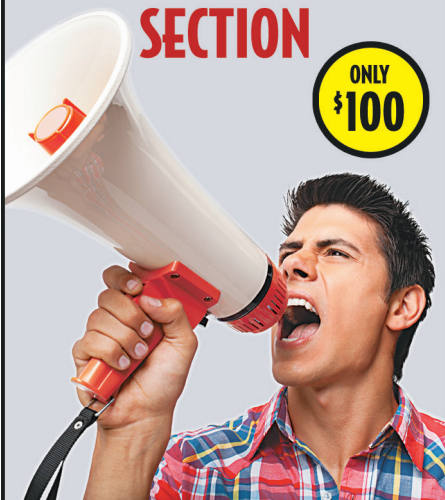
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ADOPTION OPTIONS FINDING THE RIGHT FIT FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

BY KATHLEEN BRADBURY

What is a family? The answer may seem simple, but for many people in the GLBT community, the definition of family extends beyond blood-relatives who share a dwelling space. It's common to hear of chosen families, closely knit networks of people with whom we actively choose to connect and grow. As the number of rainbow families increases, one thing remains the same: the decision to add children to GLBT families is often an intentional choice, whether it be through adoption, fertility treatments, or surrogacy.

Because many people in our community have not been fully accepted or supported by their biological families, GLBT folks often have a stronger understanding about how important it is to belong to an intentionally chosen family. This awareness allows for a unique connection between GLBT people and children who are waiting to be adopted by parents who will love and support them unconditionally.

The need for adoptive families has never been greater. In Minnesota alone, there were 840 children under state guardianship last year. According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services, 73.6 percent of the waiting children were between the ages of six and 18. Unfortunately, school-age and teenage children are often overlooked when people plan to adopt, and many kids age out of the system without ever belonging to a family.

When folks are ready to become parents, it's important to consider how adoption can play a role in building families. And Minnesota's GLBT families are fortunate many agencies are clear that GLBT couples are wanted and needed as adoptive parents. Through the assistance of MN ADOPT, Ampersand Families, and The Adoption Programs of Children's Home Society of Minnesota and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (CH/LSS), prospective parents are able to open their hearts and homes to children who need forever families.

MN ADOPT: RESOURCES FOR STRONG FAMILIES

Assisting many Minnesota adoption agencies is MN ADOPT, a non-placing organization whose mission is "to promote and support successful adoptions for Minnesota kids and families." Rachel Walstad, executive



Tony, Danny, Leland, and Leon Porter.
Photo courtesy of the Porter Family

director of MN ADOPT, says their status as a non-placing agency is intentional: “It allows us to partner with the counties and agencies to support and complement their services. We’re the bookends of the process; families are able to get a lot of front-end information from us...and we also have training, our HELP Program, and other post-adoption services.”

One large element of MN ADOPT’s organization is that they host the Minnesota Waiting Children list, also known as the State Adoption Exchange. This database contains a list of all the children who need homes in Minnesota, as well as the families who are looking to adopt or foster children. The list allows adoption agencies and social workers to more easily pair families to children, and Walstad notes that the ultimate goal is “to make sure that every kid in Minnesota has a home.”

In June of 2015, State Adoption Exchange successfully helped two-year-old Leland find a home with Dan and Tony Porter. Leland’s adoption team was familiar with the Porters and their previous adoption of their son Leon, and the team believed that Leland would be a great match. You may remember the Porter family from a previous issue of *Lavender* (August 21, 2014) since we have been following them through the years as they’ve navigated this process. Dan recalls the tense excitement of the possibility of adding another child to their family: “Leland’s birthrights weren’t terminated yet when we got the call. It was exciting but scary because we didn’t want to get our hopes up and have the adoption fall through.”

But everything went as planned, and Leland was officially adopted on March 24, 2016. Dan and Tony threw Leland an adoption birthday party, a tradition they started with Leon to celebrate his adoption day. Dan notes that the “second birthday is another way to show the boys just how special they are.”

For Tony, one of the greatest parts of parenthood is watching the boys bond. “Leon will sit and read to Leland. Just watching that bond grow is really rewarding...it warms your heart and brings tears to your eyes.” Dan adds that he enjoys seeing how Leland engages with other people: “He wants to share with other people who his family is, and he recognizes that he is part of it.” Even at his young age, Leland now knows that he is with a family that will love him forever and unconditionally.

But many waiting children aren’t as lucky as Leland. For older kids,

especially those who enter the system at a later age, Walstad says the odds are stacked against them. The children who age out at 18 may not necessarily need legal guardians anymore, but Walstad adds, “the reality is, we all need families.” MN ADOPT’s outreach is therefore a crucial step in making sure Minnesota follows through on its commitments to find homes for children within the foster care system.

In addition to the Waiting Children list’s database of photos and brief biographical information, MN ADOPT has partnered with the *Star Tribune* to feature a waiting child each month. And starting in 2015, Twin Cities Live developed a segment called “Kid Connection,” which not only highlights children in need of homes, but also gives them a special experience they’ll remember forever. For example, one teen interested in fashion got to meet with a designer from *Project Runway*, and another child got some special time with the Minnesota Lynx.

Walstad reports that “Kid Connection” has been quite successful; in the first year, 10 of the 24 kids featured in the segment were able to find adoptive homes. Additionally, many adoptive parents have noted how “Kid Connection” has played a part in their decision to adopt a child. Walstad contributes this significance to the segment’s ability to highlight a child’s interests: “When you have a kid out there doing what they’re passionate about, their personality can really shine through.”

Through education and outreach, MN ADOPT’s goal is to “get as many families as possible to explore adoption through foster care.” While not every family will decide that it is the best option, they may discover another way to assist children in the system. For people who want to get involved without fully committing to adoption, Walstad suggests considering foster care. Currently, there is a huge shortage of foster families and respite care providers in Minnesota. The short-term care options greatly increase support for families in transition phases and provide safe places for children before they are permanently adopted.

Additionally, Walstad emphasizes the importance of supporting adoptive families within our own communities. She encourages people to support existing families who have adopted children by offering assistance and showing them their families are not alone in this journey.

If people don’t know anyone who has adopted children, adoption and foster care agencies can always benefit greatly from people who want to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 ➔

donate their special skills, time, or financial assistance. Even if adoption isn't in the plans for people, these options allow for Minnesota adoption agencies to place more kids with more permanent families.

● AMPERSAND FAMILIES: EVERYONE DESERVES A FAMILY

One adoption agency that works tirelessly to place Minnesota children in permanent homes is Ampersand Families. Working exclusively with children aged 10 or older, Executive Director Michelle Chalmers says Ampersand Families is looking for “healing homes and people who are willing to make an unconditional commitment.”

Chalmers adds that Ampersand Families strives to finish the job of finding safe homes for kids, noting that while removing kids from unsafe homes is the first step for protection, it cannot be the only action taken. Instead, the organization strives to find homes for all kids who are under state guardianship. But despite their efforts, Chalmers reports that there are still at least 20–30 kids who age out “as a legal orphan with membership in no family...they have no parent, no grandparents, or even siblings, at least legally. We think it is ethically and morally wrong — we need to finish the job.”

This strong commitment to finding permanent homes has influenced Ampersand Families’ kid-centered approach. Each kid who works with the agency is asked about what type of family they envision for themselves. Based on what is comfortable for the child, Ampersand is able to match kids to families with similar values. Chalmers notes that a lot of GLBT people are initially concerned about whether a kid would want to join their family, but the reality is that most of the kids are open to being placed in a GLBT home.

It’s important to note that many older kids waiting to be adopted have experienced some form of trauma, and potential families need to be ready to make a different type of commitment — a commitment to help kids heal in a safe environment. Ampersand Families helps adoptive parents on this healing journey through countless support programs, such as family check-in retreats, trauma assessments, and the new Buddy Family program, which connects adoptive families to other families who are willing to provide formal support through respite care and frequent involvement in the child’s life. For the kids who get adopted, Ampersand Families “makes an unconditional, non-time-limited commitment to our families.”

One benefit of child welfare adoptions through Ampersand Families and other agencies contracted with the Department of Human Services is that there is no cost to the adoptive family. And Minnesota supports children who have been in the adoption system by providing full medical coverage, vouchers for additional aid, and maximum financial aid for college if the kids were in the system beyond the age of 13. This allows any approved and willing parents to open their homes to waiting children without jumping over significant financial hurdles.

Unfortunately, many older children are passed up because people don’t want to deal with their pasts, preferring the myth of a “clean slate kid” through infant adoption. But Chalmers reminds that there’s no such thing as a kid with a clean slate: “Even an infant born into your arms is not the clean slate you think it is. There’s a lot going on in there that you can’t control.” Instead of unfairly considering older kids to be damaged goods, many prospective parents are drawn to the social justice component of welfare adoption. It’s a chance to help a kid who may have given up hope of ever belonging to a family.

Mark and Timothy Ferraro-Hauck have given such hope to their two adoptive sons, Sampsen, 31, and Desmond, 17. Mark and Timothy found their way to being adoptive parents unconventionally; they adopted their first son after he had aged out of foster care. And two and a half years ago, Ampersand Families connected the men with Desmond at a time when the couple wasn’t planning to adopt. As they got to know the teenager, they knew Desmond belonged with their family.

For Mark, the most exciting part of parenting older kids is when he

gets to “see the kids spark or find the thing that gets them excited about getting up in the morning. That means they are kindling a sense of hope and are wanting to pursue a future for themselves.”

Especially for older kids who may have extensive trauma, these little moments signify progress. Mark adds, “Teens in the system can be pretty hopeless about the idea that they can have a good life and a sense of agency. If you’re parenting kids who are traumatized, you have to be present to the loss and depression and not run away from it. Then, when you see them take steps forward, it’s just amazing.”

Based on their experiences with older kids, the Ferraro-Haucks acknowledge the courage of teens who are adopted: “It takes a lot to be willing to try to be part of a family again, to learn to trust a parent, to be willing to invest in a relationship after the kinds of disappointments and losses most kids in the system experience. People focus on the parents so much, but the kids are also taking huge risks and are putting themselves on the line.”

Like many other Ampersand Families, The Ferraro-Hauck understand just how vital the organization’s work is for kids and families: “If you need additional support or referrals for kids who have been through trauma, Ampersand is there to help. They are also good at helping families understand their kids.” With their commitment to helping teens find belonging, dignity, and hope, Ampersand Families helps adoptive families uphold the promise of unconditional commitment.

● THE ADOPTION PROGRAMS OF CHILDREN’S HOME AND LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICE: OPTIONS FOR EVERY FAMILY

For people who are looking for options other than foster care adoption, The Adoption Programs of Children’s Home of Minnesota and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (CH/LSS) also include infant adoption and international adoption. Kristina Berg, Director of Marketing and Global Family Support, notes that regardless of which adoption option people choose, the CH/LSS staff work diligently to make sure children are placed in homes where they can thrive. She adds, “We want to make sure any match with a family is in the best interest of not only the family, but also the child. The child is at the center of our work.”

While foster care adoption is most common among GLBT families, there are many people who choose to adopt infants or participate in the relatively new international adoption options. CH/LSS has recently developed strong ties with adoption programs from Brazil and Mexico; both countries are willing to support adoptions by GLBT couples.

Additionally, for parents who want to adopt infants, CH/LSS offers an open adoption program that matches expecting parents with adoptive families. The open adoption option allows for adoptive families and birth parents to develop a relationship that extends beyond the birth of a child, advocating for transparency about the child’s adoption and continual contact with the birth family. CH/LSS believes this “contact with the birth family allows children to grow up with a full awareness of the love that went into their adoption plan.”

Regardless of the type of adoption people choose, Berg acknowledges that there can be a “unique understanding and some shared struggles” between GLBT people and children who are up for adoption. “In general, there can be a shared bond over choosing or being part of an intentionally created family versus a biological family. There can be shared struggles with rejection and feelings of abandonment. The more any parent can identify with the struggles of the child they are adopting, the better equipped they may be to meet that child’s needs.”

The need for adoptions through Minnesota’s foster care system is most significant, yet some people are reluctant to adopt older children due to fears that the child may not easily bond with the family. Berg adds, “This fear may be shared by both the child and the family.” CH/LSS helps to ease the transition by introducing the child and family through short visits, then moving to an overnight or weekend stay when everyone is more comfortable.



Isabela and Liana have found a loving home through Children's Home and Lutheran Social Service. Photo courtesy of CH/LSS

CH/LSS also provides support for families through all the stages of adoption, beginning with free informational meetings and initial home studies. Berg explains that these initial processes help families develop "a realistic picture of what struggles may come...we never want a family to take on more than they are prepared for." Because many of the children they place have histories of trauma, CH/LSS ensures that adoptive parents have the support and the tools they need to help children heal and grow within their new homes.

This support never goes away; Berg notes that CH/LSS believes adoption to be a "lifelong journey." Through support groups for parents and children, adoption camps, and ongoing educational programming, CH/LSS ensures that families have the resources they need to grow stronger together.

Mothers Kim and Angie know first hand of CH/LSS's support through the adoption process. After having one biological son named Trysten and fostering 20 children with a variety of needs and backgrounds, Kim and Angie connected with CH/LSS and offered to provide emergency placement or respite services for kids in need. In September of 2013, Kim received an email from their social worker with "HELP!" in the subject line; two little boys needed emergency placement, so Kim and Angie took brothers Tayvean and Kody in for the night.

But what initially was supposed to be a temporary placement in a dire time of need turned into something more permanent. Kim recalls, "Right away on the following Monday, I called our social worker to tell her that the kids weren't going anywhere. We wanted to keep them...I even asked her how we could get them passports in time for an upcoming family vacation to the Cayman Islands because they belonged in our family!"

With the help of CH/LSS, Tayvean and Kody were able to go on the family trip, and the family's adventures continue to develop as their bond becomes stronger. Angie and Kim foster the boys' love for his-

tory by traveling around the United States. The next stop on their travel itinerary is Mexico, where the family intends to explore Mayan Ruins.

In addition to traveling around the United States as a family, the boys have become strongly involved in sports. Tayvean is particularly talented at hockey, and Kody seems to do well at many sports as well. The family also enjoys going to professional games with other families from CH/LSS, allowing for friendships to form between their boys and other adopted children.

Most of all, Kim and Angie are working hard to help the boys grow and develop. In addition to meeting with a family therapist to strengthen their family bond, Kim and Angie practice reading with both boys and are excited to see their progress in school. Kim adds, "Kody was initially labeled as learning-disabled, but now he is right at the expected level. The boys go to a STEM school, and it's wonderful for them because they think science is so interesting. The hands-on experience is great."

Although Kim acknowledges that sometimes the boys' needs are greater than they initially expected, she is confident that they boys are finally where they belong. She encourages people who are thinking about adoption to volunteer for respite in order to get some experience with the system: "It's not easy, and I don't think people realize that...but everybody needs a home and there are so many people who need help."

According to CH/LSS, "A family consists of two or more people, whether living together or apart, related by blood, marriage, adoption, or commitment to care for one another." Through adoption programs, children in Minnesota and across the globe are able to find the love, commitment, and support they deserve. As many GLBT people know too well, every person deserves a family, regardless of their age. As parents-to-be consider their options for building a family, it's important to remember the countless children who are waiting desperately for a place of healing and love, a place they can call home. ■

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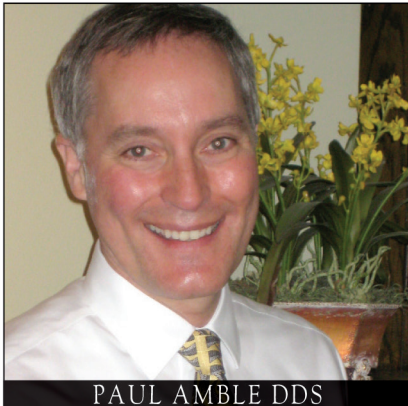


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Interesting Fact: I always wanted to be a gay man because I should've been born a queen.
Passion: Learning
Vice: Karaoke
Color: Pink



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Michael McGee

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Business Name: Michael McGee, Realtor with Coldwell Banker Burnet

How many years in business: 25

What are you drinking at happy hour? Crown and Seven

What 3 non-work items are on your desk? A coffee mug and a globe pen set. Everything else is work related!

What's the one thing you can't live without? My phone!

What's the one item you always have in your refrigerator? Milk

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Minnesotans (and Memories) at IML 2016

The 38th annual International Mr. Leather (IML) contest was held May 26–30, 2016 in Chicago. At Sunday night's contest, held at the Harris Theater in Chicago's Millennium Park, David "Tigger" Bailey, Mr. New Jersey Leather 2016, was awarded the International Mr. Leather 2016 title.

First runner-up honors went to Todd Harris, Mr. Chicago Leather 2016; second runner-up honors went to Adam "Pup Vino" Henderson, Mr. Midwest Leather 2015.

The International Mr. Bootblack contest was held concurrently with the International Mr. Leather contest, and the new International Mr. Bootblack is Erick Joseph, Alaska State Bootblack 2015, from Anchorage, Alaska.

This year marked the 23rd time I have attended the IML weekend, never having missed a year since my first IML in 1994. Considering that six of the first seven IMLs I attended used the Congress Plaza as the host hotel, and considering that the contest is again being headquartered at the Congress Plaza, it would stand to reason that as I walked through the hotel, and especially the Leather Market, I was having flashbacks and memories of years past.

For example, at the top of the escalator on the third floor was a corner space that was empty this year. But when I saw the space I remembered that many years ago it was filled with industrial-strength dungeon furniture made by two entrepreneurs from Minneapolis, and I remembered watching them having fun as they demonstrated it.

And in the room that this year held a T-shirt vendor, I remembered the year a friend was in that room staffing a booth for a Chicago organization called MAFIA (no, not organized crime; MAFIA stands for "Mid-America Fists in Action"). Ah, memories!

Now, of course, the major Minnesota presence in the Leather Market was the huge Twin Cities Leather booth, which had a room of its own and actually covered 12 booth spaces.

There were many other notable Minnesota presences this year at IML. On Thursday evening, a roast of the outgoing IML, Patrick Smith, and outgoing International Mr. Bootblack, Bamm-Bamm, was held at the Leather Archives & Museum. For the first time, two of the roasters were from Minnesota: Ren Rushold, Mr.



Left to right: IML 2016 second runner-up Adam "Pup Vino" Henderson; IML 2016 David "Tigger" Bailey; International Mr. Bootblack 2016 Erick Joseph; IML 2016 first runner-up Todd Harris. Photo by Steve Lenius.

Minneapolis Eagle 2015, and Steven Patton, Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2015. This year's roast was probably the most wicked, vicious, and politically incorrect ever. It was delightful.

Then, from Friday night's contestant introduction, to Saturday night's "Pecs and Personality" physique prejudging event, to Sunday evening's contest, many other Minnesotans helped keep the weekend going. Probably the most visible and celebrated were the two IML contestants representing Minnesota: L. Russell Waisanen, Mr. Minneapolis Eagle 2016, and Emerson Kellogg, Mr. Twin Cities Leather 2016.

Another contestant with Minnesota connections was Rob Anderson, Mr. Iowa Leather 2016, a former Twin Cities resident and member of the Atons of Minneapolis. Also highly visible throughout the weekend was Derek Harley, Mr. Minneapolis Eagle 2012, one of nine IML 2016 contest judges.

(Speaking of memories, four of the judges, including Harley, have previously been IML contestants and I had photographed all four of them as they competed.)

Other Minnesotans at IML included volunteers in many areas, including transportation logistics and social media photography. And then there were the many Minnesotans who came to Chicago simply to enjoy the weekend and cheer for their favorite contestants.

Some gay leathermen keep track of IML statistics the way some people keep track of baseball statistics. A few examples: this year there were 59 contestants, making this the largest contestant group since 2002. The contestants came from 7 countries (including, for the first time, Israel) and 25 states. David Bailey is the first IML titleholder to come from New Jersey. And contestants from Chicago, where the contest is held, have never before been among the top three finishers of the contest, leading to the idea of a "Chicago curse." This year that curse was broken: both the first and second runners-up were from the Chicago area. ■

Visit www.lavendermagazine.com to see more photos of IML 2016.




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Boy Erased: A Memoir

Garrard Conley
Riverhead Books
\$27



Conley's memoir is a harrowing narration of the devastating effects ex-gay therapy had on his and his parents' lives in the Missionary Baptist community into which his father had just become an ordained minister. Outed to his parents by a college classmate, their son's homosexuality is perceived as a life-or-death issue that had to be addressed for their son's salvation and their own place in their highly homophobic Arkansas community. An issue banal in another social milieu here taps into the depths of self-hatred and fear of damnation for this young man. In order to cure, Conley's parents send him to ex-gay therapy which inexorably begins a process of self-erasure. Conley survived, but the experience exacted a toll which has continued for over a decade.

The Whale: A Love Story

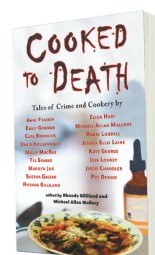
Mark Beauregard
Viking
\$26



Herman Melville did, in fact, dedicate his masterpiece *Moby Dick* to fellow author Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Beauregard's meticulously researched novel offers a plausible backstory. In the summer of 1850, Melville and his family were staying at his cousin Robert's bed-and-breakfast in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, far from pestilential Manhattan and his creditors. Melville (then 31) was struggling to complete a picaresque, even farcical, seafaring yarn titled, *The Whale*. But on this day, picnicking in the Berkshires, he met the older (46) Nathaniel Hawthorne, author of the recently published *The Scarlet Letter*, and Melville's and his white whale's fates were changed forever. Beauregard, using the authors' actual journals and letters, offers a nuanced and credible love story that affected the two men and all of American literature.

Cooked to Death: Tales of Crime and Cookery

Ed Rhonda Gilliland and Michael Allan Mallory
Nodin Press
\$16.95



Seventeen Midwestern authors serve up mayhem from appetizers in Carl Brookins' "Shrimp Charmoula" through Michael Allan Mallory's "Just Desserts." To pique your palate, each gory story is followed by a recipe for your delectation. There's a section with tasty bios of each author, among whom are Ellen Hart ("Natural, 100% Organic Murder"), Rhonda Gilliland ("Festival of Death"), Pat Dennis ("After the Before"), Anne Frasier ("Cakewalk"), and Jessie Chandler ("Red Velvet Cake to Die For"). There's everything from flat-out humor (Jess Loury's "He's Not Dead Yet") to the downright malevolent (the above-mentioned "Just Desserts") and free-ranging foul play in-between. The temptation is to just keep reading, but slow down, try a recipe or two, and try not to think about the odd, metallic taste in the icing.

The Blood Spangled Banner: A First Lady Mystery - Dolley Madison

Barbara Schlichting
Darkhouse Books
\$11.95



Welcome to Liv Anderson's First Ladies White House Dollhouse shop and to Schlichting's first *First Lady Mystery*, here featuring Dolley Madison, wife of James, and a distant relative of Liv's. A TV personality comes to the shop, but the meeting is oddly off-kilter; she snatches the Madison dolls, leaves with her mysterious retinue, and within hours is found dead atop a Madison-era dollhouse, the shop floor awash in her gore. Liv must solve the mystery while arranging for her upcoming wedding to fiancé Aaron, a police officer. The murder's tentacles reach back to Dolley herself, and Schlichting's historical knowledge supports the intricate plot. No doubt we'll again meet best friend Maggie and Liv's staunch grandparents, Marie and August, in future First Lady Mysteries. Great debut. ■

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2017 Kia Sportage



Did you know that Kia was the first Korean automaker to sell an SUV in the USA?

It's true. The original Sportage arrived in the mid-to-late 1990s to compete in a class already established by Suzuki, Geo (er, Chevrolet), and Daihatsu. It was small, just a smidge smaller than the Honda CR-V and Toyota RAV4 of that era. They were designed to tackle the trails, as well as be a conveyance for those of us with active lifestyles. However, there were questions about its quality and reliability, the same questions levied upon Kias within its first decade of business in this country. They looked fun, but they went away by 2002.

A couple of years later, a new Sportage arrived in this country. Now bolstered by Hyundai, Kia's quality began to improve. In fact, *Consumer Reports* named the second generation Sportage one of the "most reliable vehicles" sold in the USA. It certainly improved to fit its mission excellently. Of course, it predicated the future explosion of this segment.

Then came the last Sportage. At first, it was seen as different. Sure, it looked like an SUV, but the design was a bit overdone for what it should be. The loss of a window in the C-pillar had heads scratching. The combination of angles and curves also made people wonder if this vehicle was for real. Yet, what laid underneath was a more robust chassis and a good selection of driveline components. We actually liked it for not only its abilities, but its accommodations inside.

As a writer working in the automotive subject matter, I try very hard to be open minded. Yet, there will be vehicles that I would walk away with a less-than-positive summation about. This was how I felt about the last generation Kia Sportage. I still did not understand it. I was less than thrilled with how it drove. To be fair, I wished Kia would have kept to a more "traditional" SUV design as they did several years prior.

This is not to discount Kia's climb in becoming one of the most desirable brands in the automotive business. They have been making solid vehicles with great advances in driving experience, design, and technology. The Sportage took its knocks, but it already found friends amongst its owners.

Now, we are presented with the fourth generation Kia Sportage, new for 2017. Even before it hit the showroom lots, it has already taken its knocks for its design. Are these critiques really fair? I drove one to see whether it is worth the hate, or does it brush off the haters with some other special quality?

First, I'd better talk you through its design. The haters have already

spoken. No one likes the front end. No one likes the blunt design with Kia's "Tiger" grille forged onto it. However, those who have dismissed obviously missed the point. This is not 2011. This is the future, and it's staring us in the face. While it is not going to win friends and influence others, it shows a distinctive face that goes along with its distinctive look. Even upgraded details make it stand out: Kia's four-bulb fog lamps, an integrated headlamp unit on top of each fender, and a grille texture that is tied to each trim level. More compelling is the fact that the front end has a higher lip. In the SUV world, we call this "having an angle of approach." In real world terms, it means no need to scrape curbs or those old cement parking stops.

Sweeping rearwards is a modified silhouette influenced by the previous generation Sportage. The lack of glass beyond the rear door remains evident; however, the rear doors have been enlarged for a wider opening, almost 90-degrees at the hinge. The rear has been massaged with a new sculptured look with a light strip across the middle of the tailgate. New LED taillights and lower signals/backup lights finish up the look. Our SX tester came with 19-inch alloy wheels shod with Hankook Kinergy tires.

If we simply focus on the outside of an automobile, then we miss the rest of it. What's inside is a wonderful cabin. The quality is up across the board, including the usual Kia switchgear and readouts. It resides in a low cowl, yet the cluster itself looked a little dim at its highest setting and could be too tucked away for some taller drivers. The infotainment screen is a bit low, but within reach for all drivers. Everything else is good for all drivers to control, including the short gear selector for the six-speed automatic transmission.

For occupants, it is a very spacious and comfortable place to be. Front seats offer support and some bolstering, with a good grade of leather in the SX. All four doors open to an almost 90-degree angle making getting in and out very easy. Rear seat room is good, though the seats themselves could be on the hard side for some people. If you happen to have a family, you will thoroughly enjoy the space the Kia Sportage offers. Your children will enjoy the volume of the rear area, even adult children!

A special aspect to mention is the Sportage SX's audio system, which included a wonderful set of Harman/Kardon speakers emanating from the infotainment system. This system also includes playback via Pandora through Bluetooth, SiriusXM, and HD Radio. Kia also offers additional connectivity through its UVO app and hardware, along with Apple Car-

Play and Android Auto compatibility.

Sportage customers have a couple of choices to make. You can have one of two trim levels with the standard 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine with 181 horsepower. Better still, you can choose the SX model with the 240-horsepower 2.0-liter turbocharged engine. My choice is the latter, because this engine will make the haters turn into lovers. This thing offers no turbo lag and is pretty quick. The six-speed automatic is a smooth shifting setup, especially with its all-wheel drive system. There is a drawback regarding fuel economy, as it averaged 22.8 MPG in our care.

The new Sportage offers one of the smoothest rides in its class. It absorbs a lot of the road imperfections in its wake, creating a great atmosphere for drivers and passengers alike. When taking on the curves, once pushed to the limits, there will be plenty of roll and lean, along with some tire feedback. Probably best to drive it normally (i.e. slowly) through the curves. The steering is good, offering great feedback at the wheel and a solid on-center feel. I was hoping for a tighter radius, but it is good as it should be. Brakes are also excellent. It exhibited great pedal

and system performance in both normal and panic stops.

Active safety is a solid part of this Sportage SX tester. Blind spot monitoring, cross-traffic alert, reversing camera, downhill brake and hill hold assist are among the features found on this vehicle.

Even though some may argue that it does not compete in one of the hottest segments in the industry, it is priced accordingly. A 2017 Sportage LX has a base price of \$22,990. This all-wheel drive SX model came with a sticker price of \$34,895 with no additional options.

There is a lot to love about the newest Kia Sportage. Interior space is exceptional, the performance is fantastic, and it holds its own in the face of some very fierce competition. As much as we loved the previous iterations of this model, I know you will love this new version equally.

Being the first usually leads to being the best. Over the years, the Kia Sportage became a unique vehicle in its class, offering more than just looks alone. Whether you still dislike the front end or you have grown to liking it a lot, the Sportage remains a distinctive choice for customers living active lifestyles, especially if you are the one living the life! ■



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Pulse Orlando

Pulse Orlando.

Words which, borrowing a phrase, will live in infamy within the GLBT community.

How I hate writing that too.

By the time you read this piece, almost a month will have passed from the June 12 murders of 49 innocent humans. We will have had our share of vigils, candle-lit prayers, and the victims' public name-recitations.

I'm sure that news media personalities and cameras will have moved on by now; similarly, we'll no longer nightly hear from shooting survivors or from family members and loved ones of those who didn't make it.

No, in the moment your eyes read these words, the country — the world, actually — will have moved on to something else, perhaps even to another horrific mass shooting or some other sad incident in which humans die because of ideology or religion or simply because of an individual's grave, uncontrollable depression.

We humans are like that, you know. Limited attention spans, focused on only the latest and most immediate.

Yet, please let me double back to the shooter (like other media commentators, I will not use the gunman's name) and what we've learned about him (at least by the time I pen these words). As the FBI publicly stated, there's a need to create a profile of the shooter to prevent similar tragedies from occurring. Amen to that.

We know the shooter was of a particular religion that's generally intolerant of GLBT persons. We also understand that at the moment of the horror, he proclaimed allegiance to ISIS, that human-killing machine.

Along with that information, we've heard the shooter had significant behavior issues in public school and, later, in community college. We know that he abused the first woman he married, whom he subsequently divorced; later, he remarried and fathered a son.

Immediately after the tragedy, the shooter's father rationalized that he chose Pulse because of an intense hatred for gay persons, as represented by statements the shooter made when he witnessed two men kissing in public several weeks earlier.

Was it actually (and simply) hatred of gay men that caused the shooter to enter Pulse with an arsenal of destruction? Or was it self-hatred that fueled this tragedy?

For my purposes, what we've also learned is that the shooter had a Grindr profile (along with pictures) and frequented gay bars (including Pulse) for several years. Several gay persons have come forward to say

that they had interacted with the shooter at gay clubs, although no one has admitted to hooking up with him. (Perhaps that news will avail itself by this piece's publication.) Since the shooter lived more than 100 miles from Pulse, one can assume that he tried to keep that part of his life a secret. (Note, as this piece goes to press, the FBI reports that it can't find a "paper trail" linking the shooter to gay-focused activities; that's not entirely surprising if the shooter wanted to avoid tipping off anyone as to his true identity.)

Secrets. Compartmentalization. Growing up in intolerant familial and religious communities. Told in so many ways that being "you" is wrong to the point where we can easily discern a level of self-disgust and hatred.

It all sounds so familiar, doesn't it?

I don't believe for a second that the shooter opened a Grindr account or visited far-away gay clubs to plan some kind of mass casualty attack.

Rather, and this isn't a newflash to anyone who's struggled with a sexual or gender identity, the shooter was testing the waters, just as we all did during our collective journey of moving from self-loathing to self-truth. It's just that the shooter (I'm theorizing, of course) never got to self-truth.

Instead, he remained stuck at self-loathing; more likely it was self-hatred. Big time.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist, let alone an FBI profiler, to understand that the shooter's internalized feelings eventually morphed into a fanatical hatred of those who would tempt him. What better way to end the temptation than to extinguish the tempters, especially when you know that you'll die (e.g. you'll end your own inner suffering) in the process?

In support of this theory, I cite the transcripts of the shooter's conversations with law enforcement and the media. While he pledged allegiance to ISIS, he didn't utter a single word of disgust about GLBT people. One would think that if he was acting on religious principles against gays, he'd mention it somewhere in his rantings. Yet, that apparently didn't happen.

Assuming I'm right about all of this, then we're faced with the obvious question: how do we change the human self-narrative relative to sexual or gender identity?

In other words, what will it take for everyone to understand that being GLBT isn't a choice? ■

Ellen (Ellie) Krug is the author of Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change (2013). She frequently speaks and trains on diversity and inclusion topics; visit her website at www.elliekrug.com. She welcomes your comments at ellenkrugwriter@gmail.com.





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Putting On the Brakes

Nonsense. It dominates my life. It lumbers across my personal galaxy like a bulky, brutish planet, eclipsing meaning and shoving insight into a black hole. It distracts me. Makes me miss important moments. It causes me to focus on the promise of dessert instead of enjoying the meal in front of me.

There are those rare days, though, when the heavy veil of nonsense is parted by wonder and connection. On these days, life seems bigger and my existence seems smaller.

Today was one of those days. But it didn't start out that way.

It started out with me crabby.

I woke up at 5 a.m. irritated because I had a lot to do that day. I had to get from point A to point B and to a lot of points further down the alphabet. And there were obstacles in the way.

I was irritated even though I had just returned from a 10-day trip to Cape Cod, my favorite place in the world(!), with my favorite person in the world(!), the love of my life who I reconnected with miraculously after 25 years apart(!). Two days before we left on our trip, we completed the purchase of a home(!) where we'll live with her kids(!) and my dogs(!).

That day I had to leave early from our suburban home to travel to my beautiful cottage(!) on a Great Lake(!). I had to take a ride on my boat(!). I had to see a good friend who I haven't seen in 20 years(!) and finally meet her children(!). They had been staying at my cottage while I was in Cape Cod and we would have only a few hours before they had to head back home to Denver.

In spite of this good fortune that was showering down from my heavens, all I could focus on was nonsense. The drive would take two hours each way! I had to pick up boxes for our move! I had to complete a small

work assignment! I had to pay my water bill online!

By the time I arrived at my cottage to meet my friend and her kids, I was already planning my exit. I rushed in and with only a glancing embrace announced that I had boxes to buy! Water bills to pay! Yes, I had just arrived, but I would have to leave very soon.

My friend looked up from what she was doing, which was inserting a feeding tube into her five-year-old's stomach. She is a single mom who has adopted three disabled children. "We're just happy to spend any time you can spare," she said with incredible calm and generosity, when what she should have been doing was punching me in the face.

Suddenly, her two teenagers appeared from a bedroom. "We don't have to go on the boat," the 17-year-old said. "Maybe we can just take a walk and get to know you."

And it was that hammer blow, that moment of grace and maturity from a fully realized human being, that obliterated the nonsense clouding my world view. Suddenly, I felt alive. I was present. I was completely focused on point A and not worried about getting to point B.

We did take a walk! We did go on the boat! We did get to know each other!

And then, at lunch, when I asked for the check, the waitress said that it had already been paid by neighboring patrons who had witnessed my friend's masterful mothering and wanted to show their appreciation.

These small moments of grace happened 24 hours after the massacre in Orlando. It was a powerful reminder to me that while focusing on day-to-day nonsense can help numb the pain of life, it also blocks joy, hope, and love. I'm sure that tomorrow I'll be focused once again on paying that stupid water bill, but today, I lived. ■

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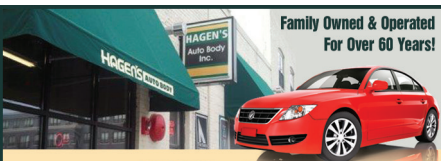
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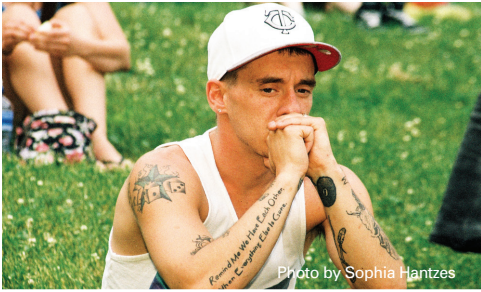
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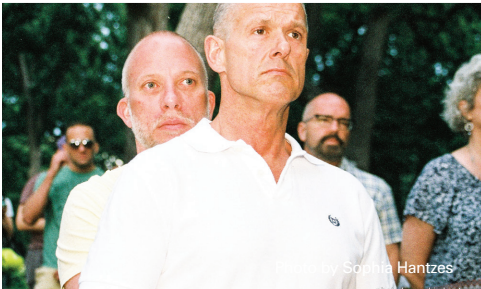
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